

Tower, Say Again!

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My flight lead is safe, his jet is shut down, and the fire chief has declared the emergency over. The pins are barely in the HARMs before I start thinking about all the things we did wrong.

It only took a few seconds to saturate my cave man-sized brain, and I'm still caught in that post-Emergency Procedure (EP) daze where everything that just happened seems a bit surreal. In a span of 5 minutes, my flight had to deal with a complex EP, complications, and a communications nightmare. The only thing I'm sure of is that there's no "Sim" or stand-up procedure to prepare me for what just happened.

Flying over Iraq can be anything from downright boring to a bit too exciting, and anywhere in-between. Over the past several weeks, it has

occurred to me that the most dangerous part of flying in Operation SOUTHERN WATCH may not necessarily be the Iraqi "gunners." Instead, we seem to be in greater danger of running into each other on our way to and from Iraq. A common theme is the communications barrier and lack of "understanding" that seems to prevail between the Saudi controllers and our aircrews. For any given flight, the biggest lessons learned seem to involve "communications." Today was no different.

Any day I get to fly is a good one. Period. Today the dust was actually on the ground (as op-

posed to the air, in my ears, nose, teeth, and shorts), and a nice easy breeze made the desert almost tolerable. As usual the sunrise was worthy of more than just a cursory glance, and they even served blueberries with breakfast. Getting off the ground, to the tanker, and into the Area of Responsibility (AOR) seemed to be easier than usual. I could actually see the Kuwaiti coast from Iraq, and there were no dust storms to obscure visibility. The Iraqis decided to stay indoors today, so my job as wingman kept getting easier. Stay visual with lead, stay in formation, and stay off the radios.



Photo by SSgt Cecilia M. Ricardo Jr.